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DOI:

[10.1111/1475-6765.12341](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12341)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Savage, L. (2020). Religion, Partisanship, and Preferences for Redistribution. *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL RESEARCH*, 59(1), 91-113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12341>

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## Religion, Partisanship, and Preferences for Redistribution

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### Abstract

This article offers a new theoretical explanation of the relationship between religion and the demand for redistribution. Previous literature shows that religious individuals are less likely to favor redistribution either because (a) religion provides a substitute for state welfare provision or (b) it adds a salient moral dimension to an individual's calculus which induces them to act contrary to their economic interests. In this article, the author argues that the effect of religion on an individual's redistributive preferences is best explained by their partisanship, via a process of partisan motivated reasoning. In contexts where parties are able to combine religion with pro-redistribution policies, religious individuals are more likely to favour redistribution as doing so reinforces partisan identity. In advanced democracies, religious individuals are more likely to be supporters of centre-right parties which oppose redistribution. However, in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the historical and political context leads to the opposite expectation. The nature of party competition in CEE has seen nationalist populist parties adopt policy platforms that combine religion and leftist economic programmes. They are able to credibly combine these two positions due to the way in which religion and the welfare state became linked to conceptions of the nation during the inter-war state-building years. Using data from 2002-2014, the author shows that religiosity is associated with pro-redistribution attitudes in CEE. Furthermore, religious supporters of nationalist populist parties are more likely to favor redistribution than religious supporters of other parties. The results of this research add greater nuance to our understanding of the relationship between religiosity and economic preferences.

Key words: partisanship, religion, redistribution, inequality, Europe

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the reviewers and editors for the *European Journal of Political Research* for their detailed comments and feedback.

## Introduction

Religion is a key determinant of attitudes towards redistribution. In their seminal article, Scheve and Stasavage (2006) found that religious individuals are less likely to support redistribution. They argue that for religious individuals, the church provides psychological benefits that are a substitute for social insurance derived from the state. De La O and Rodden (2008) offer an alternative explanation, suggesting that religiosity increases the salience of a moral values dimension which draws low income voters into coalitions with the upper and middle classes. This leads low income voters to prefer economic policies which are contrary to their self-interest. Irrespective of the theoretical perspective adopted, the inverse relationship between religiosity and preferences for redistribution has been replicated numerous times and remains consistent across denominations (Jordan, 2014; Stegmueller et al., 2012).

In this article, I set out an alternative explanation of the relationship between religion and preferences for redistribution which can lead to results that are contrary to the findings of previous research. I argue that the partisanship of religious individuals provides a more generalizable explanation for their redistributive preferences. This is due to individuals engaging in *partisan motivated reasoning*, whereby they process information in a way that allows them to defend and maintain their partisan identity (Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Kunda, 1990; Petersen et al., 2013; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Existing research on religion and redistributive preferences is largely based on samples of advanced democracies. These countries generally have conventional patterns of party competition in which the left is associated with redistributive politics, secularity, and liberal values and the right are associated more with greater emphasis on self-reliance, religiosity, and traditional values. As religious individuals are more likely to support parties of the right in advanced democracies (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009), their opposition to redistribution aligns with their partisan affiliation. In the newer democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), this is not necessarily the case. In CEE, parties of the nationalist populist right adopt positions that emphasize both religiosity and left-wing economic policies. As a result, I argue that due to

individuals engaging in partisan motivated reasoning, religiosity has the opposite effect in CEE and will be associated with support for greater redistribution.

However, research has shown that partisanship does not always trump information when individuals evaluate an issue (Bullock, 2011; Mullinix, 2016; Slothuus, 2010). Right-wing nationalist parties therefore need to be able to credibly adopt left-wing positions so that individuals can reasonably defend their partisan identities. In CEE, I show that nationalist populist parties can do this for two reasons: first, the dimensionality of party competition in CEE fundamentally differs from that observed in Western Europe. Second, in CEE, both the welfare state and religion were used to build support for the post-imperial nation-states during the inter-war years. This led to a fusion of national identity with religious identity as well as equating the welfare state with the nation-state (Aidukaite, 2009; Grzymala-Busse, 2015; Inglot, 2008). Nationalist populist parties can draw on this conception of nationalism to credibly adopt left-wing stances on economic matters. Religious individuals can therefore incorporate support for redistribution into their partisan identities.

I test this argument using data from seven waves of the European Social Survey over the period 2002 to 2014. The results confirm that religious individuals are more likely to favor redistribution in CEE. Furthermore, the relationship between religiosity and pro-redistribution preferences is conditional on party identification: religious supporters of nationalist populist parties are more likely to favor redistribution. The results of this research indicate that the construction of partisan identities can condition the influence that religion has on individual-level preferences for redistribution. This research therefore contributes a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and redistribution which, while focused on new democracies, also has implications for our understanding of this relationship in advanced democracies.

### **Religion and redistribution**

Religious institutions have been a crucial part of the development of welfare states in advanced democracies though the scope and direction of their influence is a matter for debate

(Manow and van Kersbergen, 2009). One may expect that religiosity encourages altruism and support for welfare states that assist those in need, though not necessarily in a redistributive manner. This is supported by Catholic social doctrine and the role of the Catholic Church in the development of Christian democratic welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kahl, 2005). While this led to larger welfare states in countries influenced by Christian democracy, the guiding principals have been based around self-insured social protection and status preservation rather than redistribution, which was considered too disruptive to society (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Pontusson & Rueda, 2010; van Kersbergen & Hemerijck, 2004). Research has shown that welfare spending is high under Christian democratic governments, but the distributive profile of taxes and transfers offsets that spending, so redistribution is low (Bradley, Huber, Moller, Nielsen, & Stephens, 2003). Furthermore, analysis of manifesto data shows that Christian democratic parties hold similar positions on welfare and economic policies as conservative parties (Rommel & Walter, 2018). Consequently, even where Christian democracy increases support for social insurance in Western Europe, it is less likely to engender support for redistribution. Similarly, some creeds, such as Protestantism, emphasize self-reliance and may be expected to result in preferences for less redistribution (Jordan, 2014; Manow and van Kersbergen, 2009).

Denominational differences are largely irrelevant in the seminal theories of religion and redistributive preferences which instead emphasize differences between religious and secular individuals. Scheve and Stasavage (2006) set out a model in which religion acts as a substitute for social insurance. They argue that religion provides psychological benefits that help individuals to cope with adverse life events. This makes religious individuals less reliant on the state when faced with economic hardship. Scheve and Stasavage further assert that those on lower incomes are likely to derive equal, if not greater, psychological benefits from religion and will therefore oppose state-led redistribution even though it is in their economic interests. Their results show that frequent attendance at religious services accounts for around 25 percent of the standard deviation of support for social spending, a result similar in magnitude to the effect of an individual being unemployed. De La O and Rodden (2008) agree that religiosity is likely to lead to lower support for redistribution but propose an alternative explanation. They argue that religion acts as a distraction to voters. In political systems where

there is a salient moral dimension that structures voters' preferences alongside an economic dimension, the moral dimension induces conservative religious voters to prefer policies that may be contrary to their economic self-interest. Empirical testing confirms the predictions of both theories: religious individuals are less likely to favor redistribution than secular individuals. For example, using the same data and methods as those used in this article, Rueda (2018) found that non-religious individuals have 6 percent greater odds of preferring redistribution than religious individuals. Further research by Stegmueller et al. (2012) and Jordan (2014) has shown that these findings apply to both Catholics and Protestants. Stegmueller et al. conclude that "[t]he cleavage between religious and secular individuals is far more important than the difference between denominations."<sup>1</sup>

However, research shows that religion can have a variable effect on redistributive preferences, particularly in the US. McCarthy et al. (2016) found that identification with the "religious right" reduced support for tax increases on the rich but individuals who believe that Jesus promoted a just society, and Black protestants, were more likely to favour tax increases. Similar to previous research, Thomson and Froese (2018) have shown that individuals who attend religious services more frequently have 26 percent lower odds of supporting redistribution than those that do not attend services. But their results also show that individuals who identify as Republicans and believe that God is engaged in the world are more likely to support redistribution. In a broader comparative study, Gaskins et al. (2013) found that the relationship between religion and attitudes towards inequality is conditional. Poorer individuals who are religious are more likely to be economically conservative but religious participation decreases economic conservatism among the rich. These studies indicate that the general effect of religiosity on economic preferences in established democracies conforms to the expectations set out by Scheve and Stasavage (2006) and Del La O and Rodden (2008), but there may be heterogeneous effects that see the relationship reversed.

While the evidence concerning religion and redistribution is largely consistent, it is based on

samples of advanced democracies. It is therefore questionable just how far these studies are generalizable. Could we expect to find a different relationship between religiosity and redistribution in countries where the political and economic context is distinct? There is currently no research that specifically addresses the influence of religion on redistributive preferences in new democracies – although Gaskins et al. (2013) include new democracies in their pooled sample, they do not consider how their results may vary in these countries.<sup>2</sup>

Few authors have sought to examine the impact that the distinct political development of CEE states has had on redistributive attitudes though some have shown that individuals in the region are more likely to support redistribution compared to those in Western Europe (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007; Corneo and Gruner, 2002; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) ascribe this to the influence of the communist legacy on political preferences, though it should be noted that they explicitly state that they are assessing attitudes towards the welfare state rather than redistribution, which also entails other policies, such as taxation. They also examine how communist socialization interacts with religion, finding that the communist legacy had no effect on the welfare spending preferences of regular churchgoers compared to non-churchgoers (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). There is then, reason to believe that the welfare preferences of *practicing* religious individuals are not influenced by the communist legacy. It is my contention that rather than looking to the communist legacy for an explanation of redistributive attitudes, we should instead consider other distinctive features of CEE countries.

One such feature is the nature of party competition in new democracies. In established democracies, parties of the left are the standard-bearers of pro-redistribution policies and are also more likely to have a secular outlook (Rueda, 2018; Savage, 2019). By contrast, parties of the mainstream right are associated with less state intervention and usually place greater emphasis on religion in public life. At the individual level, research has shown that both religiosity and support for more right-wing parties are associated with opposition to redistribution (Scheve and Stasavage, 2006). But could we still expect religious individuals to

oppose redistribution in contexts where right-wing parties can credibly adopt pro-redistribution policy platforms? In the next section, I argue that when right-wing parties that appeal to religious voters can credibly adopt leftist economic positions, religious individuals will be more likely to support redistribution. They can do so via a process of partisan motivated reasoning.

### **Partisanship, religion, and redistribution**

The influence of partisanship on public opinion has a rich history beginning with *The American Voter* in which the authors described parties as opinion-forming agencies (Campbell et al., 1960). Since then, partisanship has often been characterized as a perceptual screen through which individuals filter politically-relevant information (Kam, 2005; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). But how does an individual's partisanship affect preference formation? Over the last 15 years or so, a growing body of research has indicated that the effect of partisanship can be explained by motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Individuals are motivated by two types of goal when attempting to process information: accuracy and directional goals. Accuracy goals refer to an individual's desire to evaluate information in a way that leads to the formation of a "correct" opinion. Directional goals describe an individual's motivation to arrive at a particular conclusion that conforms with prior attitudes or beliefs via processes of confirmation or disconfirmation bias (Taber and Lodge, 2006). Maintaining and defending one's partisan identity is an example of a directional goal which has been termed *partisan motivated reasoning* (Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). Individuals that engage in partisan motivated reasoning attempt to process information in a way that is consistent with, and helps to preserve, their partisan identity. Previous research has shown that partisan motivated reasoning can affect an individual's evaluations of politicians (Goren, 2002), perceptions of public support or opposition to a given policy or issue (Nir, 2011), and how policy outcomes are evaluated by individuals (McCabe, 2016). Crucially, partisan motivated reasoning has also been shown to influence an individual's attitudes and policy preferences. Studies demonstrate that individuals are more likely to adopt a policy if it has been endorsed by their chosen party (Bolsen et al., 2014; Druckman et al., 2013; Slothuus, 2010) and will



expend greater effort to process information in order to defend a position that has been endorsed by their party either by attempting to confirm their position or to discredit opposing evidence (Petersen et al., 2013; Taber and Lodge, 2006).

However, individuals do not unthinkingly adopt a party's policy positions all the time. Bullock (2011) has shown that information about policies can affect an individual's attitudes as much as partisanship. Prior beliefs and or attitudes can also be more powerful influences on an individual's decision-making than partisanship. Using a natural experiment, Slothuus (2010) found that when the Danish Social Democrats announced a major policy shift on early retirement benefits, party identifiers were more likely to shift their positions on the issue. But this effect was only present among those identifiers that share the prior belief that the welfare system was under stress (Slothuus, 2010). Similarly, Mullinix (2016) demonstrates that when parties take non-traditional positions on an issue, thus resulting in partisan motivated reasoning and issue motivated reasoning pulling in opposite directions, individuals can be more likely to engage in issue-motivated reasoning if the policy at hand is salient to them personally or if elites are not polarized on the issue (Mullinix, 2016).

If right-wing parties adopt interventionist positions on the economy they are also adopting non-traditional issue positions and therefore, party identifiers need a strong reason to adjust their own positions. For religious identifiers of right-wing parties, this requirement increases as we know from previous research that religion is strongly associated with right-wing economic attitudes (Scheve and Stasavage, 2006; Stegmueller et al., 2012). In CEE, there are two factors that allow certain right-wing parties to adopt credible left-wing positions on economic issues: first, the structure of party competition in CEE. Second, the importance of both religion and the welfare state to conceptions of nationalism in the region.

### **Redistribution and party competition in CEE**

Right-wing, nationalist populist parties are a common feature of the political landscape in CEE. They are distinguished from extreme nationalist parties by their less virulent nationalist

rhetoric and their greater concern with issues that appeal to non-nationalist groups. For extreme nationalists, matters of race and ethnicity are primary (Pop-Eleches, 2010). For these reasons, nationalist populists are legitimate contenders for government in CEE whereas extreme nationalists are marginal players.<sup>3</sup> Despite being labelled right-wing, these parties often adopt left-wing economic policies. As a result, the structure of party competition in CEE differs from that found in Western Europe (Savage, 2016). In both regions, the two-dimensional space of competition can be conceptualized using an economic left-right dimension and a values dimension that runs from traditional to liberal values (Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, & Edwards, 2007). However, the positions of certain party families within that space varies between East and West. Specifically, those parties that Marks et al. describe as “radical TAN”<sup>4</sup> combine right-wing economic profiles with traditional values in the West. But in CEE, these parties hold leftist economic platforms along with traditional values (Marks et al., 2007; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012). Recent research has shown that right-wing populist parties in Western Europe have become more pro-welfare over time as their electorate has become more working class, though the salience of redistributive policy to their platforms remains a matter of debate (Afonso & Rennwald, 2018). Some authors argue that economic policy is of secondary importance compared to immigration and nativism to such parties and that they deliberately blur their economic positions (Mudde, 2007; Rovny, 2013). Individual-level studies also show that supporters of right-wing populist parties still tend to oppose redistribution in Western Europe (Rueda 2018; Zhirkov 2014).

Competing explanations have been offered for the phenomenon of right-wing parties subscribing to leftist economic policies in CEE. For some, it is a legacy of communism. Communism, it is argued, was an economically left-wing but socially authoritarian experience, improving distributive outcomes but repressing dissent and self-expression. Democratic and market reform increased economic inequality as well as political inclusion but also created groups that did not benefit from the transformation. For parties appealing to the “losers of democratization”, left-wing and traditionalist platforms are seen as the polar opposite of the new democratic order (Kitschelt, 1992; Marks et al., 2007). However, Marks et al. only present evidence from parties’ positions in the ideological space. When their argument has

been tested at the individual-level, there is limited support for the notion that right-wing populists appeal to the losers of transition. Many of the transitional losers identified by Marks et al. – the elderly, poorly educated, and unemployed – are not more likely to support right-wing populists in CEE (Allen, 2017; Stanley, 2011).

Alternatively, Tavits and Letki (2009) argue that right-wing populist parties adopted leftist economic policies opportunistically. Left-wing parties were better placed to implement the fiscal austerity policies required during the economic reform process. This was due to the stronger organizational bases that left-wing parties possessed combined with their stable and more loyal electorate. Consequently, while governing left-wing parties reduced public expenditure, right-wing parties had both the opportunity and incentive to appeal to voters suffering economic hardship by advocating redistributive policies (Tavits and Letki, 2009). While this argument is plausible and contributed to the decline of social democratic parties in CEE, previous research also shows that voters do not necessarily respond to such changes in policy position by parties particularly if the issue is salient to individuals or the party is adopting a non-traditional position on a policy (Mullinix, 2016; Slothuus, 2010).

An alternative explanation lies in the way in which nationalist populist parties can fuse religion and redistribution in CEE. Since the fall of communism, nationalist populist parties have used religion as part of their rhetorical appeal. Buzalka (2008) has identified three features that link religion with populism in CEE: “the pre-eminence and defence of the patriarchal family and a rigid moral order, the complicated obsession with the nation, and beliefs about the role of ‘the people’ and their traditions.” For some parties, such as Law and Justice in Poland, this has been crucial to their electoral success (Stanley, 2016). In the case of Fidesz, one of the most successful right-wing populist parties in CEE, religion has not been prominent in the party’s manifestos, but since 2006, leader Viktor Orban has repeatedly used references to Christianity in his rhetoric to justify opposition to immigration from mainly Muslim countries. Furthermore, the Hungarian Fundamental Law passed by the Fidesz government in 2011 pointedly refers to Hungary as a country based on Christian values (Ádám and Bozóki, 2016).

This emphasis on religion has been combined with an economic platform that is more redistributive. In part, this is an appeal to individuals who subjectively see themselves as losers of transition, such as those who are aggrieved by the progress made by minority groups in society (Bustikova, 2014). However, welfare policy is also a way for parties to reinforce traditional values which have been perceived to be threatened by democratic and economic liberalization. Some nationalist populist parties have used welfare policy as a way of re-establishing traditional family roles which had been transformed under communism. Gender equality was notionally part of the communist project and women were encouraged to be economically active during this period. In the postcommunist era, nationalists, supported by churches, sought to reverse this trend and persuade women to adopt a traditional role in the household (Pascall and Manning, 2000; Szikra, 2014). Family policy became a way to do this with improved maternity leave and family benefits. And in the case of Poland, the government adopted the 'Family 500+' policy which pays families a generous monthly benefit for second and all subsequent children (Financial Times, 2016).

In turn, voters have responded to the religious and redistributive appeals of right-wing populists. In CEE, it has been shown that the voters of right-wing populist parties are more likely to be both religious and supporters of redistribution (Allen, 2017). In Western Europe religious individuals are already committed to established Conservative and Christian Democratic parties that oppose redistribution, and despite the movement of such parties to more pro-welfare positions (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018), they have not gravitated towards the populist right as they have in CEE (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009; Rueda, 2018). It is therefore likely that religious individuals in Western Europe that engage in partisan motivated reasoning will adopt the right-wing economic positions of Conservative and Christian Democratic parties. But how can nationalist populists in CEE credibly combine religion and redistribution?

## **Religion, the welfare state, and the nation state**

The inter-war period had a significant influence on how national identity came to be defined in CEE. During this period, CEE states began the processes of consolidation of the nation state and welfare state expansion. It is during this time that national identity became imbued with religion and support for the welfare state initially became part of nationalist discourse (Cerami and Stanescu, 2009; Inglot, 2008). Governments in CEE used religion to bolster their state-building projects which resulted in a fusion of religious identity and national identity (Grzymala-Busse, 2015; Tomka, 1998). This usually privileged one particular religious group such as Catholics in Lithuania and Poland and Orthodox and Greek Catholics in Romania (Stan and Turcescu, 2011).

The association of national identity with religion and the welfare state persisted through, and was perhaps enhanced by, the communist period. Secularization was a strand of Marxism-Leninism which argued that religion distracted the working class from their real interests. However, secularization was only partly successful in communist Europe; for example, the church remained strong in Poland throughout the communist period while in Romania the church persisted in part by allying itself with the nationalist communist regime (Stan and Turcescu, 2011). Churches also found ways to work with the state in most countries, particularly after the early years of communism in Eastern Europe. The communist commitment to comprehensive welfare coverage for those in need drew support from churches. For the regime, churches were used to try and quell opposition groups, for example, by acting as mediators between the state and opposition movements (Stan and Turcescu, 2011). However, churches also represented a center of resistance to the regimes' attempts to redefine national identity as class identity. churches came to be regarded as guardians of national identity and, as Grzymala-Busse (2015) puts it, "patriotism blurred with religious loyalty." The result was a deepening of the fusion between religion and national identity that had begun during the inter-war period.

The welfare state also became part of the state-building project in CEE during the inter-war

period. Industrialization and modernization arrived later in CEE compared to Western Europe.

During the inter-war years, CEE countries were still largely agrarian economies. Approximately 74 percent of workers were employed in agriculture in Poland in the early 1920s as were 56 percent of Hungarian employees. The proportion employed in agriculture in Czechoslovakia at this time was lower at 42 percent but this was by some distance the largest single sector of the labor market (Inglot, 2008).

Despite this low-level of industrialization, CEE countries had begun to establish welfare states (Szikra and Tomka, 2009). All states inherited limited systems of social insurance following the collapse of imperial rule in Europe. These were often restricted to pension provision for civil servants but they were soon expanded as the principles of Bismarckian welfare states were considered essential to the state-building projects of all countries in CEE (Aidukaite, 2009; Cerami and Stanescu, 2009; Inglot, 2008). By the end of the 1920s, across the region, governments implemented or expanded policies of social insurance for sickness, injuries, and old age (Szikra and Tomka, 2009) though the scope of coverage provided by these schemes varied within and between countries (Inglot, 2008). Nevertheless, welfare states were essential tools of building support for nascent nation-states and along with religion, they were used by governments to create the sense of common-cause, culture, and solidarity between individuals that is required for consolidating a nation-state.

The fusion of nationalism with religion, combined with the historical association of the welfare state with the nation state in CEE enables right-wing populist parties to credibly bundle together religion with a redistributive economic policy platform. The credibility of the nationalist populist's left-wing economic platform means that religious supporters of such parties are likely to be influenced by partisan motivated reasoning as their partisan identities and issue preferences pull in the same direction (Mullinix, 2016). Furthermore, religious individuals in CEE are not challenged by automatic associations of redistributive policies with social democratic parties due to the distinct pattern of party competition in the region. As a

result, religious individuals will hold more favorable preferences for redistribution in CEE. This is in contrast to the relationship observed in advanced democracies:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals in CEE that are more religious will be more likely to support redistribution than secular individuals.

It is also expected that supporters of nationalist populist parties will be more likely to favor redistribution as they align their policy positions with their partisan orientations. Combining this expectation with Hypothesis 1, religious supporters of nationalist populist parties will be more likely to favor redistribution than religious supporters of other parties in CEE. This leads to two additional hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Partisan supporters of nationalist populist parties will be more likely to favor redistribution than supporters of other parties.

Hypothesis 3: Religious partisan supporters of nationalist populist parties will be more likely to favor redistribution than religious supporters of other parties.

## **Data and methods**

I test these hypotheses using a pooled dataset of individual level attitudes in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia. The data is taken from seven waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) which covers the period from 2002 to 2014. The sample used in this research is comprised of approximately 52,000 individuals. As the context within which individuals live can influence their political preferences, I add several country-level variables to the dataset for use in multilevel models.

### ***Dependent variable***

The dependent variable in this research is a survey item which asks respondents the extent to which they agree with the following statement: “The government should take measures to

reduce differences in income levels.” Respondents have five possible answers ranging from 1 (Agree strongly) to 5 (Disagree strongly). This question and a similar question from the International Social Survey Programme are commonly-used to assess an individual’s redistributive preferences (e.g. Cusack et al., 2006; Finseraas, 2009; Rueda, 2018). I follow Rueda (2018) and recode this into a binary indicator which takes a value of 1 if a respondent agrees strongly or agrees with the statement and a value of 0 if they neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or disagree strongly. While this results in some loss of variance from the dependent variable, as Rueda (2018) argues, when support for redistribution is high as it is in CEE (see Figure 1), the neutral category can justifiably be interpreted as a less overt expression of opposition. In Table S6 of the supplementary material I replicate all models from Table 1 using the original 5-category dependent variable. The results remain substantively the same and do not change the conclusions of this paper. The distribution of responses to the question can be seen in Figure 1. A clear majority of respondents in all countries favor redistribution ranging from 61 percent in the Czech Republic to 90 percent in Lithuania. A high level of support for redistribution is not unusual though it is, on average, higher in CEE than in advanced democracies (Corneo and Gruner, 2002).

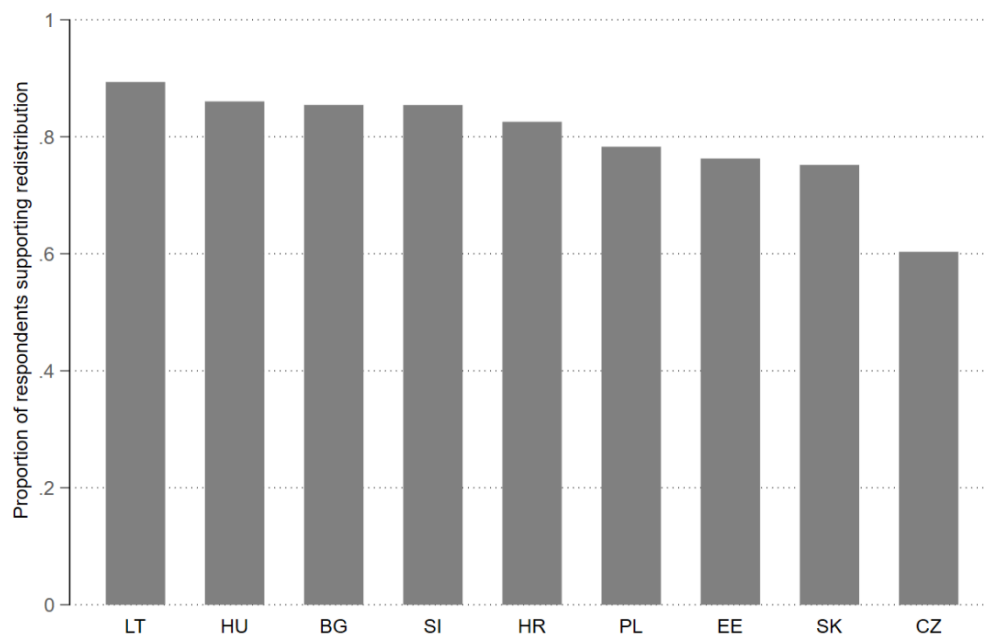


Figure 1: Proportion who agree and strongly agree that the government should reduce differences in income.



### ***Independent variables***

The first independent variable measures the religiosity of respondents. In line with previous research in this field I define religious individuals as those for whom *practicing* religion is central to their life. This is manifest in their frequency of attendance at religious services (Scheve and Stasavage, 2006; Haggard et al., 2013). The ESS asks respondents: “Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?”. I classify those who state that they attend services at least once a week as religious (coded 1 in the dataset). Individuals who replied that they attend Church “once a month”, “only on special holy days”, “less often”, and “never” are defined as not religious (coded 0). 20 percent of the sample are classified as religious.<sup>5</sup>

To evaluate hypotheses two and three, partisanship is measured using the party identification question from the ESS which asks: “Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?”. Respondents are then asked to name the party. To aid cross-national comparison, I code the responses into party families using the *ParlGov Database* (Döring and Manow, 2016) the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015) and data from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2017). I have added to these party families using Pop-Eleches’s (2010) concept of unorthodox parties which considers the specificity of the CEE party landscape. He identifies four types of unorthodox party: nationalist populists, centrist populists, extreme nationalists, and the radical left. Nationalist populists and extreme nationalists are distinguished by the latter’s more virulent rhetoric while the more populist policy platforms of the former have seen some become mainstream parties of government e.g. Fidesz in Hungary since 2010.

### ***Control variables***

I include several controls in each model all of which are standard in studies of redistributive preferences. These are the demographic variables age and age squared to capture any non-linearity in the effect of age, together with gender. An indicator of whether a respondent is presently, or has been, a trade union member is included along with a measure of

respondents' income (measured in deciles), employment status, education<sup>6</sup> and occupation.<sup>7</sup> I also include two controls which may be expected to negate the effect of religiosity. First, the effect of religious denomination is assessed using a categorical indicator. Given the predominance of the Catholic Church in the countries in this sample, it is expected that Catholics will be more likely to favor redistribution than secular individuals. Second, domicile is an indicator of where individuals live with the expectation that individuals in more peripheral areas will be less prosperous. Individuals in rural areas are also more likely to be religious.

Each model also contains three country-level controls which I have added to the dataset. The first is the Gini coefficient. Previous research has shown that demand for redistribution will be higher in countries where cross-sectional inequality is higher. The Gini coefficient is measured on a scale from 0 to 100 and is taken from the UN World Income Inequality Database (UNU-WIDER, 2017). Second, GDP per capita in current US dollars which controls for the level of economic development in each country is included in the model. GDP data is taken from the World Bank Databank.<sup>8</sup> The final macrolevel variable is ethnic fractionalization, as formulated by Alesina et al. (2003) which is the likelihood that any two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different ethnic groups. This is obtained from the Quality of Governance dataset (Teorell et al., 2013). Descriptive statistics for all variables are available in the supplementary information.

### **Estimation strategy**

The micro- and macro-level nature of the data and binary outcome of the dependent variable necessitates the use of a multilevel logit model. Although the number of groups is relatively low, a multilevel model is still able to provide reliable estimates of individual level effects (Gelman and Hill, 2007). Country level estimates when the number of groups is low may be unreliable but as the focus of this paper is not country level variables or cross-level interactions, a multilevel model is the appropriate estimation technique in this case (Bryan and Jenkins, 2016).<sup>9</sup> For individual  $i$  in country  $j$  the following equation is estimated:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Support for redistribution} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Religiosity}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Party ID}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_4 \text{Individual level controls}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_5 \text{Macro level controls}_j + \varepsilon_{0j}
\end{aligned}$$

An interaction term,  $\beta_6 \text{Religiosity}_{ij} \times \text{Party ID}_j$ , is added to the model to test hypothesis three. The data is weighted using both population and design weights.

## Results

The results of the models are displayed in Table 1. The first model assesses the effect of religiosity in the absence of interaction terms and the indicators of party identification. In this model, the coefficient for religiosity is both positive and statistically significant at the  $p=0.001$  level, indicating that religious individuals are more likely to prefer greater redistribution. Previous research based on established democracies shows that religiosity has the reverse effect: religious individuals oppose redistribution. That religiosity increases support for redistribution in CEE is evidence of a different relationship between religion and an individual's economic preferences. In substantive terms, the probability of a religious individual favoring greater redistribution is 2.1 percent higher than that of non-religious respondents. To compare this to the effect of other variables in the model, individuals in the third income decile have a 2.4 percent greater probability of supporting redistribution than those in the fifth decile, an effect comparable to that of religiosity. Considered another way, the odds ratio for religiosity shows that religious individuals have 19 percent greater odds of supporting redistribution than non-religious individuals.

Table 1: Religion and preferences for redistribution

	(1) $\beta/(s.e.)$	(2) $\beta/(s.e.)$	(3) $\beta/(s.e.)$
Religiosity	0.176*** (0.014)	0.169*** (0.015)	0.159*** (0.015)
No religion (ref.)			
Roman Catholic	0.242** (0.081)	0.273*** (0.066)	0.278*** (0.065)
Protestant	0.031 (0.147)	0.039 (0.137)	0.052 (0.133)
Eastern Orthodox	0.393 (0.319)	0.413 (0.306)	0.417 (0.304)
Other	0.197* (0.099)	0.176 (0.105)	0.193 (0.100)
Big city (ref.)			
Suburbs	0.147 (0.080)	0.176** (0.061)	0.177** (0.061)
Town	0.282*** (0.053)	0.278*** (0.050)	0.276*** (0.049)
Country village	0.337*** (0.042)	0.319*** (0.038)	0.319*** (0.038)
Countryside	0.260 (0.183)	0.243 (0.182)	0.239 (0.182)
Social democrat		0.312*** (0.055)	0.315*** (0.055)
Liberal		-0.621*** (0.086)	-0.682*** (0.157)
Conservative		-0.497 (0.279)	-0.470 (0.298)
Christian democrat		-0.590*** (0.010)	-0.636*** (0.018)
Nationalist populist		0.263*** (0.046)	0.123* (0.059)
Centrist populist		-0.266 (0.142)	-0.251 (0.143)
Extreme right		-0.111 (0.346)	0.021 (0.307)
Radical left		0.495 (0.388)	0.784** (0.245)
Religiosity $\times$ Soc. dems.			-0.005 (0.022)
Religiosity $\times$ Liberal			0.133 (0.188)
Religiosity $\times$ Cons.			-0.158

Table continued on next page

**Table 1 – continued from previous page**

	(1) $\beta/(s.e.)$	(2) $\beta/(s.e.)$	(3) $\beta/(s.e.)$
Religiosity × Chris. dems.			(0.273) 0.117***
Religiosity × Nats. pops.			(0.025) 0.234**
Religiosity × Cent. pops.			(0.073) -0.147*
Religiosity × Ext. right			(0.067) -0.593**
Religiosity × Rad. left			(0.193) -0.910***
Constant	0.657 (1.516)	-2.204 (1.623)	(0.218) -2.008 (1.610)
Country variance	0.220** (0.073)	0.232** (0.073)	0.235** (0.073)
N	51958	51262	51262
Countries	9	9	9
Log-likelihood	-13653.191	-13442.397	-13433.261
AIC	27324.381	26900.794	26882.522

p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Note: Each model also includes the following controls the results of which are not shown to reduce the size of the table: age, age<sup>2</sup>, gender, trade union membership, income, education, and the macrolevel variables ethnic fractionalization, log GDP, and the Gini coefficient. The full version of the table can be found in Table S2 of the supplementary material.

To test the robustness of the relationship I included two controls in model one which may confound the effect of religiosity. Firstly, it may be expected that simply belonging to a faith — as opposed to frequently attending services — could be a better indicator of an individual's welfare preferences. Secondly, it could be argued that individuals who live in more peripheral regions would be more likely to prefer redistribution as these areas tend to be economically disadvantaged. Model one shows that neither of these variables negates the effect of religiosity. The model shows that regardless of an individual's devotion to their faith, followers of the Catholic Church are significantly more likely to support redistribution than secular individuals in Central and Eastern Europe. While some existing literature has suggested followers of the Catholic faith would be more likely to favor redistributive policies (Kahl, 2005), empirical research has found that this is not the case in advanced democracies

(Stegmueller et al., 2012). This result challenges existing knowledge however, it should be noted that Catholics comprise 46 percent of the sample while Protestants and followers of other faiths represent just 13 percent. One should therefore be cautious about interpreting this as evidence of a Catholic-Protestant divide in attitudes towards redistribution. Instead, it is evidence of a religious-secular divide that works in the opposite direction to that found in advanced democracies, as secular individuals in CEE are more likely to hold less favorable attitudes towards redistribution than followers of the dominant faith in the countries in this sample. As expected, individuals that live in more peripheral regions — indicated in the table as towns, villages, and the countryside — are more likely to hold pro-redistribution policy preferences than big city dwellers. The fact that religiosity remains a significant indicator even after the addition of these potentially confounding variables suggests that this finding is robust, thus allowing me to confirm hypothesis one.

Model two includes the indicator of party identification. As one may expect, individuals that identify with parties of the center (liberals) and mainstream right (Christian democrats and conservatives) are less likely to favor redistribution while supporters of social democrats and the radical left are more likely to favor redistribution. The probability of a liberal party identifier preferring redistribution is 75 percent and at the other end of the scale, those that identify with the radical left have an 89 percent probability of favoring redistribution. This reinforces the point concerning the generally high level of support for redistribution in CEE. The only parties of which supporters are significantly more likely to favor redistribution are social democrats and nationalist populists. Supporters of both parties have an 87 percent probability of preferring greater redistribution. Interestingly, those that identify with extreme right parties are less likely to support redistribution. This is likely to be a result of the primacy such parties place on issues relating to culture and the position of ethnic minority groups in certain countries such as Slovakia (Bustikova, 2014). These results provide qualified support for hypothesis two. Supporters of nationalist populist parties are more likely to prefer traditionally left-wing redistributive policies which demonstrates evidence of partisan motivated reasoning. However, one argument of this paper is that religious individuals are motivated to support redistribution because of their partisan identification. If so, then religious supporters of nationalist populists should be more likely to favor redistribution than the religious supporters of other parties due to the

association of nationalism with religion and the welfare state.

Model three shows the results of the interaction of religiosity with party identification. It shows that religiosity significantly increases support for redistribution among individuals that identify with Christian democratic and nationalist populist parties. Conversely, religious supporters of extreme right and radical left parties are less likely to favor redistribution. That the results for the extreme right and radical left are similar may appear surprising, however, in CEE, these party families share several traits and appeal to similar voters. The radical left in CEE are defined as much by their overt xenophobic nationalism as extreme right parties (Ishiyama, 2009). For both party families, issues associated with the nation-state rather than distribution are primary. It is therefore not surprising that individuals with extreme right attitudes can end up supporting radical left parties in some CEE countries; Ishiyama (2009) has termed this the “red-brown impulse”.

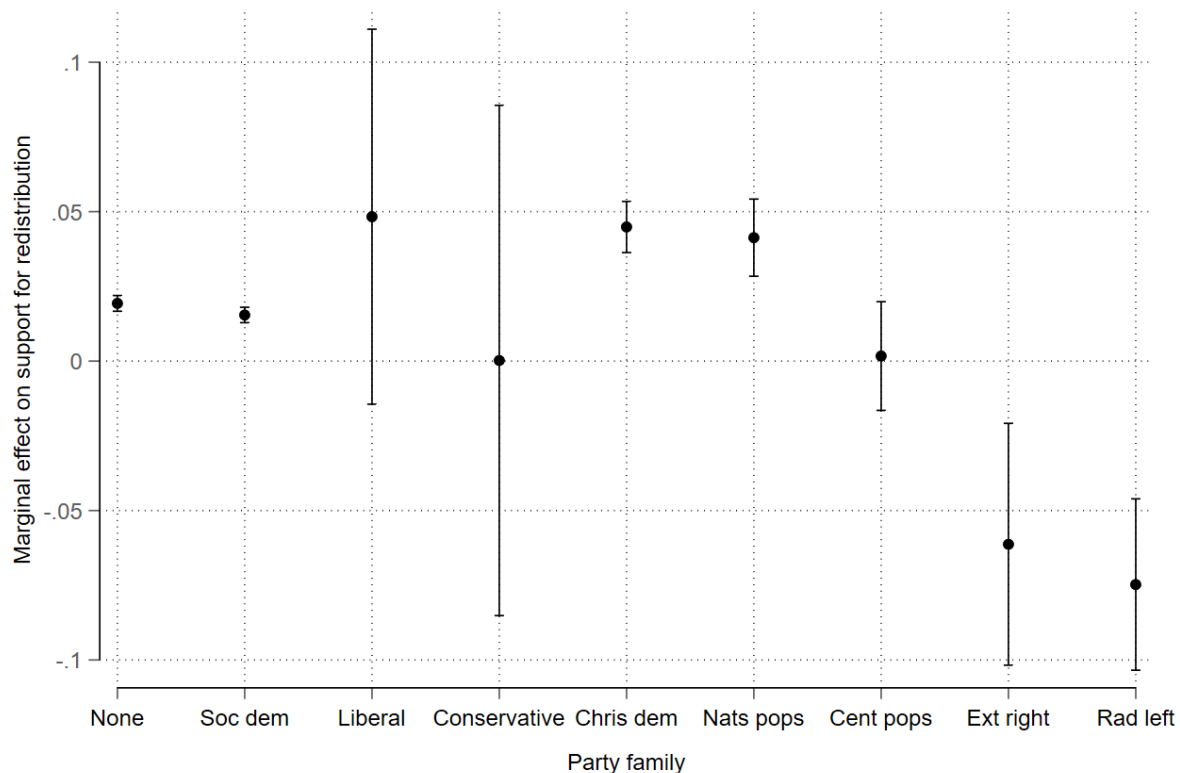


Figure 2: Marginal effect of religiosity on preferences for redistribution conditional on party identification

Figure 2 illustrates the results from model three, showing the marginal effect of religiosity on preferences for redistribution conditional on party identification. Religiosity significantly increases the probability that an individual will favor redistribution by 4.5 percent among supporters of Christian democrats and 4.1 percent among supporters of nationalist populists. However, it should be noted that the actual probability of religious individual favoring redistribution is lower among Christian democrat supporters at 78 percent compared to 89 percent for nationalist populist identifiers. The 4.1 percent increased probability of favoring redistribution among religious supporters of nationalist populist parties is almost double the marginal effect of religiosity alone which is 2.1 percent based on results from model one. This provides support for hypothesis three: the effect of religiosity on support for redistribution is conditional on identification with nationalist populist parties which can credibly bundle together leftist economic policy positions and a traditional religious outlook. Therefore, left-wing economic positions align with the partisan identities of religious individuals in CEE.

The control variables largely conform to expectations based on previous research. The results for these are not shown in Table 1 but can be found in the full version of the table in the supplementary material (Table S2). Individuals with lower incomes and the unemployed are more likely to favor redistribution as they will be net beneficiaries of any redistributive policies (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). It may also be the case that religious individuals are more likely to be from lower income groups. In Table S4, model one, of the supplementary material to this article I test this proposition by interacting income with religiosity. The results show that poorer religious individuals are less likely to support redistribution which is similar to the findings of Gaskins et al., (2013) however, the coefficient is not statistically significant. Therefore, in CEE, religious individuals right across the income distribution are more likely to support redistribution than non-religious individuals. Those who are at greater risk of income loss are also more likely to favor redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe. Low levels of education, which indicates that individuals have less marketable skills (Cusack et al., 2006), and working in a low-status occupation are both significantly associated with support for redistribution in all models in Table 1. Similarly, trade union members are also more likely to favor redistribution as union membership is often an indicator that an individual perceives themselves, or their occupational sector, to be particularly vulnerable to unemployment (Cusack et al., 2006). Finally,



both older respondents and women are more likely to hold pro-redistribution policy preferences.

Turning to the macrolevel variables, neither GDP nor the level of ethnic fractionalization are significant. However, the result for inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, does indicate that higher levels of inequality are significantly associated with greater individual-level support for redistribution as may be expected based on the Meltzer-Richard model (1981). The results of the control variables demonstrate the generalizability of many of the key theories of attitudes towards redistribution which further underscores the importance of the main findings of this research. The effect of religion on the demand for redistribution in CEE shows that existing explanations of the relationship are limited in some respects. The theory outlined in this research provides an explanation for the results observed in CEE but it is also applicable to advanced democracies and may supplement existing theories to provide a more thorough understanding of the impact of religion.

### **Robustness checks**

The results presented in Table 1 provide support for the central argument of this article. However, the question of the communist legacy hangs over any analysis of political behavior in CEE (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). Disentangling the communist legacy from other influences can be difficult. One way that it can be addressed in this research is by identifying a subset of post-communist countries where the welfare state was not used alongside religion to support the nation-building process. In such countries, right-wing populist parties will not be able to use both religion and redistributive appeals to define supporters' partisan identities. The ESS contains data for both Russia and Ukraine where welfare expansion occurred much later compared to CEE and when both countries were part of the Soviet Union. The delayed onset of welfare expansion was due to the emphasis that was placed on rapid industrialization and defense in the Soviet Union between the 1930s and 1950s which consumed the vast proportion of state resources (Smith, 1988). Social policies, such as income support and pensions, were implemented with limited coverage from the 1930s but the expansion of these policies occurred as industrialization gathered pace from the 1960s onwards (McAuley, 2008). Therefore, there should not be the same association of religion with the welfare state in Russia and Ukraine that we find in CEE. Consequently, religiosity should not be associated with pro-redistributive economic preferences.

I test this by specifying separate logit models of religiosity and redistributive preferences for both Russia and Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> The results are reported in Table 2. In both countries, religiosity is negatively associated with redistributive preferences, similar to Western Europe where welfare state expansion also occurred subsequent to the state-building process. The coefficients in these models are not significant but they do provide evidence of a different relationship between religiosity and redistributive preferences in former-Soviet countries compared to CEE countries. Most importantly, these results show that support for redistribution among religious individuals is not a legacy of communism. Instead, the evidence from Table 1 and Table 2 provides support for the central argument of this article.

Table 2: Religion and preferences for redistribution in Russia and Ukraine

	(1) Russia b/se	(2) Ukraine b/se
Religiosity	-0.079 (0.091)	-0.093 (0.119)
N	7797	4670
Log-likelihood	-18747.571	-3959.109
AIC	37523.141	7944.218

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Note: Models contain the control variables age, age<sup>2</sup>, gender, trade union membership, income, and education. The full models including controls can be found in Table S7 of the online appendix

The mechanism outlined in this research can also be tested by examining countries outside of CEE in which state-building was not directed against the church and where the welfare state was used as part of the state-building process. In most established democracies, state-building was completed long before the development of social protection policies. One potential exception may be Ireland where state-building and the establishment of initial welfare institutions occurred around the same time during the inter-war period. While the Catholic church was influential in the development of the Irish state, both the church and government were less concerned with social protection. Successive governments from 1923 were influenced by the austere economic principles of the founder of Sinn

Féin, Arthur Griffith (Powell, 2017). Limiting expansion of the state became a guiding principle under both *Cumann na nGaedheal* and Fianna Fáil governments (Kelly, 1999; Powell, 2017). Moreover, given the predominantly agricultural Irish economy, and the influence of rural interests in setting the political agenda, the state prioritized land redistribution, leading to what Norris (2016) terms a ‘property-based welfare state’. The lack of a strong organized labour movement during this period also limited support for expansion of the state. Given these developmental differences with CEE, there is less reason to expect a strong relationship between religiosity and support for redistribution in Ireland. However, there is reason to believe that religious supporters of Fianna Fáil, the right-wing party which implemented most of Ireland’s welfare state policies, would be more likely to favour redistribution given the church’s relationship with the party during state-building.

To test this, I ran two logit models using data from the ESS. The first model in Table S8 of the supplementary material shows that religious individuals in Ireland are more likely to support redistribution, but the coefficient is not statistically significant. Model two in the table contains an interaction term for religiosity and party identification. This shows that religious Fianna Fáil supporters are more likely to favour redistribution than non-religious supporters. These results provide partial support for the mechanism set out in this paper though, as noted, the specificities of Ireland’s state-building process mean that it is not directly comparable to CEE.

Previous research has shown that in CEE, authoritarian attitudes are associated with left-wing economic orientations (De Regt et al., 2011). This is unsurprising given the legacy of communism which was both an authoritarian political system and highly redistributive economic system. Authoritarian values are also associated with religiosity (Schwartz, 2003). There is therefore the possibility that religiosity and support for the welfare state in CEE are, in fact, proxies for authoritarian values. Model two of Table S4 includes indicators of authoritarian values derived from the Schwartz Human Values Scale in the ESS.<sup>11</sup> Including these variables does not change the effect of religiosity on redistributive preferences.

Finally, some studies of redistributive preferences include an indicator of an individual’s ideological

orientation (Finseraas, 2009). I opted not to include left-right orientation in the main models as the variable suffers from a fairly high degree of item non-response – including ideology reduces the number of observations in this research by approximately 10,000. In Table S5 I specified models that include left-right orientation; the main results of this research remain unchanged.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The results of this research show that religiosity has a fundamentally different effect on preferences for redistribution in CEE compared to established democracies. In contrast to established democracies, religious individuals in CEE are more likely to favour state intervention to increase redistribution. This is a surprising result in the context of prior research which has shown that religion tends to induce individuals to oppose redistribution (Scheve and Stasavage, 2006, De La O and Rodden, 2008).

In this research I have argued that the effect of religion on redistributive preferences can be explained by partisan motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Religious individuals adopt redistributive positions that correspond with their partisan identities. In Western Europe, religious individuals generally support parties of the conservative right (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009) which are faced by well-established social democratic parties of the left. This leads religious individuals to oppose redistribution. But in CEE, nationalist populist parties draw support from religious individuals. These parties also adopt leftist economic positions and consequently, religious individuals in CEE are motivated to support greater redistribution. Because partisanship does not always override other beliefs and attributes (Mullinix, 2016; Slothuus, 2010), nationalist parties need to be able to credibly adopt left-wing economic positions so that these do not challenge the partisan identities of individuals. Parties are able to do so due to the dimensionality of party competition in CEE (Tavits and Letki, 2009) combined with the historic association of both religion and the welfare state with conceptions of nationalism in the region (Aidukaite, 2009; Cerami and Stanescu, 2009; Grzymala-Busse, 2015; Inglot, 2008).

Taken together, the results of this research demonstrate that the dominant theories of how religion

relates to redistributive preferences do not travel well to new democracies. In this article, I have offered an alternative explanation to argue that partisan motivated reasoning can influence how religious individuals form their preferences for redistribution. The results presented here support this argument. While the focus of this paper has been CEE, the theoretical framework is not specific to the region. Partisan motivated reasoning is likely to see religious individuals adopt redistributive preferences that align with the positions of their parties in both older and younger democracies. One question that remains is under what conditions it is possible that religious individuals in advanced democracies could support redistribution? Four conditions would need to be met: first, space for competition would need to open on the left of the economic policy dimension. Second, religious individuals would have to shift from their current alignment with conservative parties. Third, an alternative party standing on a redistributive platform would need to appeal to religious individuals. Fourth, this alternative party would need to be able to credibly justify its redistributive platform to religious voters. We are perhaps seeing some of these conditions emerge in Western Europe. Social democratic parties are in electoral decline, thus creating space for competition on the left of the economic policy dimension. Furthermore, radical right-wing parties are shifting their previously pro-market economic platforms to combine elements of pro-welfare policies with traditionalist values (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018), though the credibility of that shift remains a matter for debate. However, for now, religious individuals still seem committed to conservative parties in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan (2014) finds that support for redistribution is, overall, greater in countries that have a Catholic tradition. However, the individual level results of his research confirm the expectations of the Scheve and Stasavage and De La O and Rodden models.

<sup>2</sup> Haggard et al. (2013) have assessed preferences for redistribution in a pooled sample of new democracies in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. Religiosity is included in their models as a control variable and is associated with opposition to redistribution. However, pooling data across such different regions risks overlooking important contextual differences.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that some extreme nationalists have become junior partners in coalition governments, for example, the Slovak National Party, though none have led a cabinet in the region.

<sup>4</sup> TAN stands for traditional, authoritarian, nationalist. The opposite end of the spectrum is referred to as GAL: green, alternative, liberal.

<sup>5</sup> The results of this research are unaffected if the threshold for regular church attendance is set at “once a month”.

<sup>6</sup> The education variable is the ESS harmonized version of the International Standard Classification of Education (EISCED). The seven categories of the EISCED have been recoded to five categories. Categories 3 (lower tier upper secondary) and 4 (upper tier upper secondary) are combined into a single category, as are category 6 (lower tertiary education, BA level) and category 7 (higher tertiary education, MA level). See ESS documentation for a full outline of the EISCED coding procedure (ESS, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> In this paper I use Oesch’s (2008) classification of occupations based on ISCO-88. To simplify the model, I recode this into two indicators of whether a respondent has a high status or low status occupation. High status occupations are those classified as socio-cultural professionals and semi-professionals and technical professionals and semi-professionals. Low status occupations are those classified as service workers and production workers (Oesch, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Data series code NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

<sup>9</sup> I also estimate the models in Table 1 using logistic regression. The results of these models can be found in Table S3 of the supplementary material and confirm the conclusions of this paper

<sup>10</sup> As these are individual country models they do not contain country-level variables.

<sup>11</sup> See the online appendix for a description of the variables used.